

Travel Health

There are health risks, for people of all ages, associated with long distance and overseas travel. Some simple planning and preparation can help a traveller to have a safe and healthy trip.

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)

A DVT is a blood clot that forms in a deep vein in the leg. It can move through the bloodstream to other organs, causing serious problems. Sitting or lying still for a long time (e.g., while travelling) increases the risk of DVT. Other factors that increase the risk of DVT include:

- Age over 40 years
- Smoking
- Recent surgery or injury
- Pregnancy
- Family history of DVT
- Overweight
- Blood clotting disorders
- Hormone medicines (e.g., oral contraceptives)

- Certain medical conditions (e.g., heart disease, cancer).

Symptoms include:

- Leg swelling, redness, warmth
- Leg pain or tenderness.

Ways to reduce your chances of getting a DVT while travelling include:

- Wear compression stockings or socks – ask a pharmacist
- Move legs and feet for a few minutes every hour and occasionally walk around
- Do not sit cross-legged
- Avoid tight clothing, especially from the waist down
- Drink plenty of water, juice and soft drinks. Limit alcohol and caffeine-containing drinks.

If you have risk factors for DVT, consult a doctor before you travel.

Jet lag

Jet lag is the time it takes for the body 'clock' to get used to the local time in a new place. The degree of jet lag depends on the number of time zones crossed and direction of travel. Jet lag usually lasts a few days.

Symptoms include:

- Irritability, anxiety
- Poor concentration, disorientation
- Poor appetite, upset stomach
- Tiredness, sleeping difficulties.

Ways to reduce jet lag when flying include:

- Have enough sleep the night before you leave
- Travel westward. Plan a stopover if possible
- Eat only when hungry. Eat light, healthy meals and drink plenty of water
- Limit or avoid alcohol and caffeine
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.

Travellers' diarrhoea (TD)

TD is very common. It is usually caused by eating or drinking food, water or ice contaminated with microorganisms.

Symptoms include:

- Stomach cramps, pain and bloating
- Frequent runny, watery bowel motions
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fever
- Blood in bowel motions.

Ways to reduce your chances of getting TD include:

- Check whether tap water and local food at your destination is safe to consume
- Drink only boiled, canned, bottled or purified drinks; avoid ice
- Avoid eating anything that might have been washed in local water (e.g., salads). If you can't peel it or cook it, don't eat it
- Avoid brushing teeth in local water
- Avoid unpasteurised milk and dairy products
- Avoid shellfish
- Avoid food that is uncooked, undercooked, reheated or has been cooked and kept at room temperature for several hours
- Wash your hands before meals and after each toilet visit. Dry your hands with your own towel or let them air dry.

Ways to treat TD include:

- Drink at least 3 litres of clear fluid daily. 'Oral rehydration solution' is best – ask a doctor or pharmacist
- Rest and if hungry, eat bland carbohydrate foods
- Antibiotics in severe cases.

Malaria

Malaria is a serious infection spread by infected mosquitos.

Symptoms include:

- Fever, chills, sweating
- Headache.

Malaria can cause organ failure, coma or death.

Ways to reduce your chances of getting malaria include:

- Use insect repellent containing diethyl toluamide (DEET) on exposed skin and clothing
- Use mosquito nets
- Cover arms, legs and ankles with clothing when outdoors, especially after sunset
- Medicine to prevent malaria. Where you are going will determine what medicine you need. Ask a doctor or pharmacist.

Self care

Before travelling

- Visit a doctor and dentist for a checkup at least six to eight weeks before travelling.
- Ensure immunisations are up-to-date. At least eight weeks before travelling, check if any special vaccinations are needed.
- For 'adventure' holidays, get advice about relevant health issues (e.g., altitude sickness, fitness).
- Have eyesight checked, consider taking a spare pair of glasses.
- If you plan to carry medicines overseas, contact the embassy of the country you are visiting, to ensure the medicines are legal there. Carry a letter from your doctor that lists your medicines and doses and states they are for your personal use. Leave medicines in original packaging, so they are labelled with your name and

dosage instructions. Keep important medicines with you.

- Purchase travel insurance, including health insurance.
- Prepare a first aid/medical kit for the trip. Consider doing a first aid course.
- Wear an alert bracelet or necklace if you have a serious health condition or allergy – ask a pharmacist.

Special preparation may be necessary if you are travelling with children, are pregnant, are over 60 years or have an existing medical condition – ask a doctor or pharmacist.

While away

- Use a 30+ sunscreen and sun protective clothing when outdoors.
- Protect your skin from biting and stinging insects. Use insect repellent and protective nets and clothing.
- Do not swim in water that may be contaminated. Wear thongs when showering.
- Always follow safe sex practices. Take condoms with you rather than buying locally.

Note: Diarrhoea and medicines used to treat diarrhoea and malaria can reduce effectiveness of oral contraceptives.

On returning, consult a doctor if you develop:

- Fever or flu-like symptoms
- Diarrhoea that won't go away
- Skin problems (e.g., rash)
- Any unusual symptoms.

Note: Some diseases can take several months to develop.

For more information

Australian Dept of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Website: www.smarttraveller.gov.au

Travellers Medical and Vaccination Centre

Phone: 1300 658 844

Website: www.traveldoctor.com.au

Travellers Help

Website: www.travellers-help.com

WHO, International Travel and Health

Website: www.who.int/ith/en/

Travel Clinics Australia

Phone: 1900 969 359

Website: www.travelclinic.com.au

Healthdirect Australia

Phone: 1800 022 222

Website: www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)

Your pharmacist can advise on CMI leaflets.

National Prescribing Service (NPS) Medicines Information

Phone: 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424)

Website: www.nps.org.au

The Poisons Information Centre

In case of poisoning phone 13 11 26 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

Related fact cards

- » *First Aid in the Home*
- » *Genital Herpes*
- » *HIV/AIDS*
- » *Oral contraceptives*
- » *Sense in the Sun (website only) – ask your pharmacist*
- » *Vomiting and Diarrhoea*

Your Self Care Pharmacy: